

RANCHO SANTA ANA BOTANIC GARDEN

LEAFLETS
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TRICHOSTEMA LANATUM
ROMERO or WOOLLY BLUE CURLS

Prepared
by
RANCHO SANTA ANA BOTANIC GARDEN
of the
NATIVE PLANTS OF CALIFORNIA

Santa Ana Canyon
Orange County
California

TRICHOSTEMA LANATUM

ROMERO OR WOOLLY BLUE CURLS.

Labiatae

Mint Family

An erect, usually well-rounded soft-wooded shrub from 3 to 5 ft. high. Herbage aromatic, dark green and shining. Primary leaves opposite, linear, 2 to 3 in. long; secondary leaves smaller, borne 2 to 6 in the axil of each primary leaf. Inflorescence a long narrow thyrsus 1 to $1\frac{1}{2}$ ft. long, made up of a number of cymes, each bearing 4 to 12 flowers. Branches of the inflorescence and external floral parts densely covered with long purple, blue or whitish wool. Unopened corolla has a tube about $\frac{1}{4}$ in. long with a rounded ball about $\frac{1}{4}$ in. in diam. made up of the folded corolla lobes. Open corolla lobes are usually bluish within; four are essentially alike, the fifth or lower lobe being much larger and usually has a white spot with 2 or 3 blue spots. Stamens 4, in two pairs, the longest about $1\frac{1}{4}$ in. long, gracefully curved upward and outward through the upper pair of corolla lobes. Style similar to the stamens, but longer and 2-parted at its tip. Ovary at first merely 4-lobed, later developing 2 to 4 nutlets, each about $1/8$ in. long, rough, dark brown and slightly hairy.

Trichostema lanatum was first described in 1835 by Benth-
am, an English botanist, from specimens collected by Douglas in
California, probably in Monterey Co. The generic name is deriv-
ed from Greek and means hair and stamen. The specific name means
woolly and was given because of the long wool on the inflores-
cence. At least a half-dozen species of Trichostema are native
to western North America, but they are, for the most part, ill-
smelling annuals of no horticultural use. There is another shr-
ubby species, T. parishii, smaller in growth, much less woolly and
with differently shaped flowers. We regard it as a distinct spe-
cies, but some botanists consider it only a variety of T. lana-
tum, for which the name denuatum has been used.

The most common and attractive strain of Romero has vivid
purple wool. Occasional plants are found with white flowers and
wool. A third form has bluish or bluish-gray wool and, although
fairly common, is not so attractive as the other two.

Romero was the name given to this lovely shrub by the ear-
ly Spanish-Californians, while Americans have applied to it the
name Woolly Blue Curls. Both names are commonly used.

Trichostema lanatum is an infrequent but showy member of the chaparral belt (Upper Sonoran Zone) of the Coast Ranges from Monterey and San Benito Cos. to northern San Diego Co. It is most abundant some miles away from the coast and is also most attractive at these interior stations. It inhabits well-drained slopes of shale or even light clay, but on flats is confined to lighter soils such as decomposed granite. Wild plants bloom mainly during April and May and ripen seeds in August.

Propagation of this species by seed is comparatively difficult and the average person desiring only a few plants should buy them from one of the nurserymen who deals in California Native Plants. Seeds are slow to germinate and often require from 6 to 8 months. They should be planted in light soil in a flat in the fall or spring and transplanted as soon as large enough to handle. When the plants are about 6 months old they should be set out in their permanent location. We have grown Romero under a number of conditions, but the ideal spot is in full sun in well-drained light soil and away from other plants requiring watering during the summer months. In heavy clay soils the plants are likely to die during the winter wet season or be short-lived. Under ideal conditions the plants will shed their seeds on the ground and many volunteer seedlings will appear each spring. These are readily transplanted and provide an easy means of propagation.

There is probably no more spectacular shrub in the Botanic Garden than Romero at the height of its blooming period during the late spring. A single plant will often have from 50 to 75 or even 100 flower spikes at one time. These may be cut with stems over 2 ft. long and used in bouquets that will last well for nearly a week. When used in conjunction with the silver-gray shoots of Coast Sagebrush (Artemisia pycnocephala) the contrast of the purple and gray is especially pleasing.

Romero is such a beautiful flowering shrub that it should be widely used in California gardens. Its requirements as to soil and water are not particularly difficult to provide and when thus properly placed will live for many years, bringing a great deal of color to the garden and providing a source of numerous bouquets over many months of the year.

RANCHO SANTA ANA BOTANIC GARDEN
Of The Native Plants of California.

Established 1927

In Memory of John W. Bixby

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Purpose: A scientific institution devoted
to the growth and study of the native plants
of California for their botanical, horticult-
ural and popular features.

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